Power / knowledge
ed C. Gordon, Pantheon Books, 1980

M. Foucault

8 THE EYE OF POWER

A conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot

BAROU: Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*[1] is a work published at the end of the eighteenth century and since then fallen into oblivion. Yet in *Discipline and Punish* you cite such astonishing phrases having been applied to it as 'an event in the history of the human mind', 'a sort of Columbus's egg in the order of politics'. And you have presented its author as 'the Fourier of a police society'. For us this is baffling. But tell us first how you came upon the *Panopticon*.

FOUCAULT: It was while I was studying the origins of clinical medicine. I had been planning a study of hospital architecture in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the great movement for the reform of medical institutions was getting under way. I wanted to find out how the medical gaze was institutionalised, how it was effectively inscribed in social space, how the new form of the hospital was at once the effect and the support of a new type of gaze. In examining the series of different architectural projects which followed the second fire at the Hotel-Dieu in 1772, I noticed how the whole problem of the visibility of bodies, individuals and things, under a system of centralised observation, was one of their most constant directing principles. In the case of the hospitals this general problem involves a further difficulty: it was necessary to avoid undue contact, contagion, physical proximity and overcrowding, while at the same time ensuring ventilation and circulation of air, at once dividing space up and keeping it open, ensuring a surveillance which would be both global and individualising while at the same time carefully separating the individuals under observation. For some time I thought all these problems were specific to eighteenth-century medicine and its beliefs.

Then while studying the problems of the penal system, I noticed that all the great projects for re-organising the prisons (which date, incidentally, from a slightly later period, the first half of the nineteenth century) take up this same theme, but accompanied this time by the almost invariable reference to Bentham. There was scarcely a text or a proposal about the prisons which didn't mention Bentham's 'device'—the 'Panopticon'.

The principle was this. A perimeter building in the form of a ring. At the centre of this, a tower, pierced by large windows opening on to the inner face of the ring. The outer building is divided into cells each of which traverses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows, one opening on to the inside, facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell. All that is then needed is to put an overseer in the tower and place in each of the cells a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy. The back lighting enables one to pick out from the central tower the little captive silhouettes in the ring of cells. In short, the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseer's gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a sort of protection.

It's striking to note that already, well before Bentham, this same concern was manifested. It seems that one of the first models of this system of isolating visibility was put into practice in 1751 in the dormitories of the Military School in Paris. Each pupil there was assigned a glassed-in cell where he could be observed throughout the night without being able to have the slightest contact with his fellows or even with the domestics. There existed moreover a complicated contraption whose sole purpose was to ensure that the barber could cut each cadet's hair without physically touching him. The boy's head was passed through a sort of hatch, while his body remained behind a glass partition through which everything that occurred could be observed. Bentham relates that it was his brother who had the idea of the Panopticon while visiting the Military School. At all events the theme was in the air at the time. The installations built by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, notably the salt plant which he constructed at Arc-et-Senans, serve to give the same effect

of visibility but with an additional feature: there was a central observation-point which served as the focus of the exercise of power and, simultaneously, for the registration of knowledge. Anyway, even if the idea of the Panopticon antedates Bentham, it was he who truly formulated it—and baptised it. The very word 'Panopticon' seems crucial here, as designating the principle of a system. Thus Bentham didn't merely imagine an architectural design calculated to solve a specific problem, such as that of a prison, a school or a hospital. He proclaimed it as a veritable discovery, saying of it himself that it was 'Christopher Columbus's egg'. And indeed what Bentham proposed to the doctors, penologists, industrialists and educators was just what they had been looking for. He invented a technology of power designed to solve the problems of surveillance. One important point should be noted: Bentham thought and said that his optical system was *the* great innovation needed for the easy and effective exercise of power. It has in fact been widely employed since the end of the eighteenth century. But the procedures of power that are at work in modern societies are much more numerous, diverse and rich. It would be wrong to say that the principle of visibility governs all technologies of power used since the nineteenth century.

PERROT: So the key was architecture! Indeed, what of architecture as a mode of political organisation? For after all, in this eighteenth-century current of thought everything is spatial, on the material as well as the mental level.

FOUCAULT: The point, it seems to me, is that architecture begins at the end of the eighteenth century to become involved in problems of population, health and the urban question. Previously, the art of building corresponded to the need to make power, divinity and might manifest. The palace and the church were the great architectural forms, along with the stronghold. Architecture manifested might, the Sovereign, God. Its development was for long centred on these requirements. Then, late in the eighteenth century, new problems emerge: it becomes a question of using the disposition of space for economico-political ends.

A specific type of architecture takes shape. Philippe Ariès has written some things which seem important to me, regarding the fact that the house remains until the eighteenth

century an undifferentiated space. There are rooms: one sleeps, eats, receives visitors in them, it doesn't matter which. Then gradually space becomes specified and functional. We see this illustrated with the building of the *cités ouvrières*, between the 1830s and 1870s. The working-class family is to be fixed; by assigning it a living space with a room that serves as kitchen and dining-room, a room for the parents which is the place of procreation, and a room for the children, one prescribes a form of morality for the family. Sometimes, in the more favourable cases, you have a boys' and a girls' room. A whole history remains to be written of *spaces*—which would at the same time be the history of *powers* (both these terms in the plural)—from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations. It is surprising how long the problem of space took to emerge as a historico-political problem. Space used to be either dismissed as belonging to 'nature'—that is, the given, the basic conditions, 'physical geography', in other words a sort of 'prehistoric' stratum; or else it was conceived as the residential site or field of expansion of peoples, of a culture, a language or a State. It took Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel to develop a history of rural and maritime spaces. The development must be extended, by no longer just saying that space predetermines a history which in turn reworks and sediments itself in it. Anchorage in a space is an economico-political form which needs to be studied in detail.

Among all the reasons which led to spaces suffering for so long a certain neglect, I will mention just one, which has to do with the discourse of philosophers. At the moment when a considered politics of spaces was starting to develop, at the end of the eighteenth century, the new achievements in theoretical and experimental physics dislodged philosophy from its ancient right to speak of the world, the cosmos, finite or infinite space. This double investment of space by political technology and scientific practice reduced philosophy to the field of a problematic of time. Since Kant, what is to be thought by the philosopher is time. Hegel, Bergson, Heidegger. Along with this goes a correlative

devaluation of space, which stands on the side of the understanding, the analytical, the conceptual, the dead, the fixed, the inert. I remember ten years or so ago discussing these problems of the politics of space, and being told that it was reactionary to go on so much about space, and that time and the 'project' were what life and progress are about. I should say that this reproach came from a psychologist—psychology, the truth and the shame of nineteenth-century philosophy.

PERROTT: By the way, it seems to me that the notion of sexuality is very important in this regard. You remarked on this in the context of surveillance among the military, and it appears again in relation to the working-class family. No doubt this is a fundamental relationship.

FOUCAULT: Absolutely. With these themes of surveillance, and especially in the schools, it seems that control over sexuality becomes inscribed in architecture. In the Military Schools, the very walls speak the struggle against homosexuality and masturbation.

PERROT: Still on the question of architecture, doesn't it strike you that people like the doctors, with their considerable involvement in social policy at the end of the eighteenth century, acted in some sense as agents of the disposition of space? This is when social hygiene is born. In the name of health and cleanliness, all sorts of spatial arrangements are subjected to control. And with the renaissance of Hippocratic medicine, doctors are among those who are most sensitised to the problem of the environment, the facts of place and temperature, data which we encounter again in Howard's investigation of the prisons.[2]

FOUCAULT: Doctors at that time were among other things the specialists of space. They posed four fundamental problems. That of local conditions (regional climates, soil, humidity and dryness: under the term 'constitution', they studied these combinations of local determinants and seasonal variations which at a given moment favour a particular sort of disease); that of co-existences (either between men, questions of density and proximity, or between men and things, the question of water, sewage, ventilation, or between men and animals, the question of stables and abattoirs, or between men and the dead, the question of

cemeteries); that of residences (the environment, urban problems); that of displacements (the migration of men, the propagation of diseases). Doctors were, along with the military, the first managers of collective space. But the military were chiefly concerned to think the space of 'campaigns' (and thus of 'passages') and that of fortresses, whereas the doctors were concerned to think the space of habitations and towns. Countless people have sought the origins of sociology in Montesquieu and Comte. That is a very ignorant enterprise. Sociological knowledge (*savoir*) is formed rather in practices like those of the doctors. For instance, at the start of the nineteenth century Guépin wrote a marvellous study of the city of Nantes.

In fact if the intervention of the doctors was of capital importance at this period, this was because it was demanded by a whole new range of political and economic problems, highlighting the importance of the *facts* of population.

PERROT: What is striking moreover in Bentham's thinking is the question of the number of people. He repeatedly makes the claim to have solved the problems of discipline posed by a great number of persons in the hands of a very few.

FOUCAULT: Like his contemporaries, he faced the problem of the accumulation of men. But whereas the economists posed the problem in terms of wealth (population being in itself both wealth as labour force, source of economic activity and consumption, and cause of poverty, when excessive or idle), Bentham poses the question in terms of power—population as object of relations of domination. I think one can say that the mechanisms of power at work even in such a highly developed administration as the French monarchy were full of loopholes. It was a discontinuous, rambling, global system with little hold on detail, either exercised over consolidated social groups or else imposing itself only by means of exemplary interventions (as can be readily seen in its fiscal system and its criminal justice). Power had only a weak capacity for 'resolution', as one might say in photographic terms; it was incapable of an individualising, exhaustive analysis of the social body. But the economic changes of the eighteenth century made it necessary to ensure the circulation of effects of power through progressively finer channels, gaining access to

individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions. By such means power, even when faced with ruling a multiplicity of men, could be as efficacious as if it were being exercised over a single one.

PERROT: The demographic upswings of the eighteenth century certainly contributed towards the development of such a form of power.

BAROU: Isn't it astonishing then to find the French Revolution, through people like Lafayette, welcoming the project of the Panopticon? We know that he helped to have Bentham made a 'French citizen' in 1791.

FOUCAULT: I would say Bentham was the complement to Rousseau. What in fact was the Rousseauist dream that motivated many of the revolutionaries? It was the dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zones of darkness, zones established by the privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of some corporation, zones of disorder. It was the dream that each individual, whatever position he occupied, might be able to see the whole of society, that men's hearts should communicate, their vision be unobstructed by obstacles, and that opinion of all reign over each. Starobinski has written some most interesting pages about this in *La Transparence et l'Obstacle* and *L'Invention de la liberté*.

Bentham is both that and the opposite. He poses the problem of visibility, but thinks of a visibility organised entirely around a dominating, overseeing gaze. He effects the project of a universal visibility which exists to serve a rigorous, meticulous power. Thus Bentham's obsession, the technical idea of the exercise of an 'all-seeing' power, is grafted on to the great Rousseauist theme which is in some sense the lyrical note of the Revolution. The two things combine into a working whole, Rousseau's lyricism and Bentham's obsession.

PERROT: There is a phrase in the *Panopticon*: 'Each comrade becomes an overseer'.

FOUCAULT: Rousseau no doubt would have said the reverse: each overseer should become a comrade. Take *Émile*: Émile's tutor is an overseer, he must also be a comrade.

BAROU: Not only does the French Revolution not read Bentham as we do today, it even finds a humanitarian intention in his project.

FOUCAULT: Exactly. When the Revolution poses the question of a new justice, what does it envisage as its principle? Opinion. The new aspect of the problem of justice, for the Revolution, was not so much to punish wrongdoers as to prevent even the possibility of wrongdoing, by immersing people in a field of total visibility where the opinion, observation and discourse of others would restrain them from harmful acts. This idea is constantly present in the texts of the Revolution.

PERROT: The immediate context also had a part to play in the adoption of the Panopticon by the Revolution. The problem of prisons was on the order of the day. Beginning in the 1770s, in England as well as in France, there was much preoccupation with this subject; this can be seen in Howard's investigation into the prisons, translated into French in 1788. Hospitals and prisons were two great themes of enlightened circles of discussion in Parisian salons. It became a matter of scandal that prisons should be as they were, a school of vice and crime, places so devoid of hygiene that people died in them. The doctors began saying how the body is wrecked in such conditions. The French Revolution in its turn undertook an investigation on a European scale. One Duquesnoy was commissioned to make a report on the so-called 'establishments of humanity', a term embracing both hospitals and prisons.

FOUCAULT: A fear haunted the latter half of the eighteenth century: the fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths. It sought to break up the patches of darkness that blocked the light, eliminate the shadowy areas of society, demolish the unlit chambers where arbitrary political acts, monarchical caprice, religious superstitions, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and the illusions of ignorance were fomented. The chateaux, lazarets, bastilles and convents inspired even in the pre-Revolutionary period a suspicion and hatred exacerbated by a certain political overdetermination. The new political and moral order could not be established until these places were eradicated. During the Revolutionary period the

Gothic novels develop a whole fantasy-world of stone walls, darkness, hideouts and dungeons which harbour, in significant complicity, brigands and aristocrats, monks and traitors. The landscapes of Ann Radcliffe's novels are composed of mountains and forests, caves, ruined castles and terrifyingly dark and silent convents. Now these imaginary spaces are like the negative of the transparency and visibility which it is aimed to establish. This reign of 'opinion', so often invoked at this time, represents a mode of operation through which power will be exercised by virtue of the mere fact of things being known and people seen in a sort of immediate, collective and anonymous gaze. A form of power whose main instance is that of opinion will refuse to tolerate areas of darkness. If Bentham's project aroused interest, this was because it provided a formula applicable to many domains, the formula of 'power through transparency', subjection by 'illumination'. In the Panopticon, there is used a form close to that of the castle—a keep surrounded by walls—to paradoxically create a space of exact legibility.

BAROU: It's also the areas of darkness in man that the century of Enlightenment wants to make disappear.

FOUCAULT: Absolutely.

PERROT: At the same time one is very struck by the techniques of power used within the Panopticon. Essentially it's the gaze; but also speech, because he has those famous 'tin tubes', that extraordinary invention, connecting the chief inspector with each of the cells, in which Bentham tells us that not just a single prisoner, but small groups of prisoners are confined. Finally, it's the importance of dissuasion that's very marked in Bentham's text. 'It is necessary', he writes, 'for the inmate to be ceaselessly under the eyes of an inspector; this is to lose the power and even almost the idea of wrong-doing'. Here we are at the heart of the preoccupations of the Revolution: preventing people from wrong-doing, taking away their wish to commit wrong. In a word, to make people unable and unwilling.

FOUCAULT: We are talking about two things here: the gaze, and interiorisation. And isn't it basically the problem of the cost of power? In reality power is only exercised at a cost. Obviously, there is an economic cost, and Bentham talks about this. How many overseers will the Panopticon need?

How much will the machine then cost to run? But there is also a specifically political cost. If you are too violent, you risk provoking revolts. Again, if you intervene in too discontinuous a manner, you risk allowing politically costly phenomena of resistance and disobedience to develop in the interstices. This was how monarchical power operated. For instance, the judiciary only arrested a derisory proportion of criminals; this was made into the argument that punishment must be spectacular so as to frighten the others. Hence there was a violent form of power which tried to attain a continuous mode of operation through the virtue of examples. The new theorists of the eighteenth century objected to this: such a form of power was too costly in proportion to its results. A great expenditure of violence is made which ultimately only had the force of an example. It even becomes necessary to multiply violence, but precisely by doing so one multiplies revolts.

PERROT: Which is what happened in the gallows riots.

FOUCAULT: In contrast to that you have the system of surveillance, which on the contrary involves very little expense. There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost. When Bentham realises what he has discovered, he calls it the Colombus's egg of political thought, a formula exactly the opposite of monarchical power. It is indeed the case that the gaze has had great importance among the techniques of power developed in the modern era, but, as I have said, it is far from being the only or even the principal system employed.

PERROT: It seems that Bentham is mainly concerned here with the problem of power over small groups of individuals. Why is this? Is it because he considers the part as already the whole—if one can succeed at the level of the small group, one can extend the procedure to take in the whole of society? Or is it rather that the ensemble of society, the question of power on the scale of the social whole were tasks that had not as yet been properly conceived? And in that case, why not?

FOUCAULT: It's the whole problem of eliminating blockages and obstacles, such as the obstacles placed in the way of decisions of power by constituted bodies and the privileges of particular groups, the clergy, the magistrature, the corporations. The bourgeoisie is perfectly well aware that a new constitution or legislature will not suffice to assure its hegemony; it realises that it has to invent a new technology ensuring the irrigation by effects of power of the whole social body down to its smallest particles. And it was by such means that the bourgeoisie not only made a revolution but succeeded in establishing a social hegemony which it has never relinquished. This is why all these inventions were so important, and why no doubt Bentham is one of the most exemplary inventors of technologies of power.

BAROU: Yet it is hard to discern who it is who stands to profit from the organised space that Bentham conceived. This seems uncertain even regarding those who occupy or visit the central tower. One has the feeling of confronting an infernal model that no one, either the watcher or the watched, can escape.

FOUCAULT: This indeed is the diabolical aspect of the idea and all the applications of it. One doesn't have here a power which is wholly in the hands of one person who can exercise it alone and totally over the others. It's a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised. This seems to me to be the characteristic of the societies installed in the nineteenth century. Power is no longer substantially identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes a machinery that no one owns. Certainly everyone doesn't occupy the same position; certain positions preponderate and permit an effect of supremacy to be produced. This is so much the case that class domination can be exercised just to the extent that power is dissociated from individual might.

PERROT: The working of the Panopticon is somewhat contradictory from this point of view. There is the chief inspector who watches over the prisoners from the central tower; but he watches his subordinates as well, the personnel in the hierarchy. This chief inspector has little faith in his overseers. He even speaks rather slightingly of them, though

they are supposed to be his auxiliaries. Bentham's thinking sounds rather aristocratic here!

At the same time, I would say that the subject of administrative personnel was a problem for industrial society. Finding the foremen and technicians to regiment and oversee the factories can't have been easy for the bosses.

FOUCAULT: This is a considerable problem that begins to be posed in the eighteenth century. It can clearly be seen in the army, when it becomes necessary to create a corps of NCO's sufficiently competent to marshal troops effectively in tactical manouvres which were often difficult, especially with the perfecting of the rifle. Military movements, shifts, lines and marches required a disciplinary personnel of this kind. The industrial workshops posed this same problem in their own way; so did the school with its masters, ushers and monitors. The Church was one of the few social bodies where these lower cadres already existed. The monk, neither particularly literate nor wholly ignorant, the vicar and the curé were indispensable when it became necessary to school hundreds of thousands of children. The State only acquired comparable cadres much later on; as for the hospitals, it's not long since the majority of their staff were nuns.

PERROT: Nuns also had a significant role in women's work: there were the well known residential establishments of the nineteenth century which housed a female work-force under the control of nuns specially trained in maintaining factory discipline.

The Panopticon is by no means foreign to such preoccupations, if one takes account of the chief inspector's surveillance of his staff and the constant watch kept over everyone through the windows of the tower, an unbroken succession of observations recalling the motto: each comrade becomes an overseer. So much so that one has the vertiginous sense of being in the presence of an invention that even its inventor is incapable of controlling. Yet it's Bentham who begins by relying on a single power, that of the central tower. As one reads him one wonders who he is putting in the tower. Is it the eye of God? But God is hardly present in the text; religion only plays a role of utility. Then who is it? In the last analysis one is forced to conclude that Bentham himself has no clear idea to whom power is to be entrusted.

FOUCAULT: He can't entrust it to any one person since no one can or may occupy the role that the King had in the old system, that is as the source of power and justice. It was implicit in the theory of monarchy that trust in the King was a necessity. His very existence, founded in God's will, he was the source of justice, law and power. Power, in his person, could only be good; a bad King was either an accident of history or a punishment by God, the absolutely good sovereign. On the other hand, if power is arranged as a machine working by a complex system of cogs and gears, where it's the place of a person which is determining, not his nature, no reliance can be placed on a single individual. If the machine were such that someone could stand outside it and assume sole responsibility for managing it, power would be identified with that one man and we would be back with a monarchical type of power. In the Panopticon each person, depending on his place, is watched by all or certain of the others. You have an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust, because there is no absolute point. The perfected form of surveillance consists in a summation of *malveillance*.

BAROU: As you say, it's a diabolical piece of machinery, sparing no one. The image, perhaps, of power today. How do you see this as having been brought about? By whose, or what will?

FOUCAULT: One impoverishes the question of power if one poses it solely in terms of legislation and constitution, in terms solely of the state and the state apparatus. Power is quite different from and more complicated, dense and pervasive than a set of laws or a state apparatus. It's impossible to get the development of productive forces characteristic of capitalism if you don't at the same time have apparatuses of power. Take the example of the division of labour in the great workshops of the eighteenth century: how could this separation of tasks have been attained without a new distribution of power on the plane of the management of the forces of production? Similarly with the modern army. New types of armament, new forms of recruitment were not sufficient: it was necessary to have at the same time this new distribution of power known as discipline, with its structures and hierarchies, its inspections, exercises and methods of training and conditioning. Without this the army as it

functioned from the eighteenth century on could not have existed.

BAROU: All the same, does someone initiate the whole business, or not?

FOUCAULT: A distinction needs to be made here. It's obvious that in an apparatus like an army or a factory, or some other such type of institution, the system of power takes a pyramidical form. Hence there is an apex. But even so, even in such a simple case, this summit doesn't form the 'source' or 'principle' from which all power derives as though from a luminous focus (the image by which the monarchy represents itself). The summit and the lower elements of the hierarchy stand in a relationship of mutual support and conditioning, a mutual 'hold' (power as a mutual and indefinite 'blackmail'). But if you ask me, 'Does this new technology of power take its historical origin from an identifiable individual or group of individuals who decide to implement it so as to further their interests or facilitate their utilisation of the social body?' then I would say 'No'. These tactics were invented and organised from the starting points of local conditions and particular needs. They took shape in piecemeal fashion, prior to any class strategy designed to weld them into vast, coherent ensembles. It should also be noted that these ensembles don't consist in a homogenisation, but rather of a complex play of supports in mutual engagement, different mechanisms of power which retain all their specific character. Thus where children are concerned at the present time, the interplay of the family, medicine, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, the school and justice doesn't have the effect of homogenising these different instances but of establishing connections, cross-references, complementarities and demarcations between them which assume that each instance retains to some extent its own special modalities.

PERROT: You are opposed to the idea of power as a superstructure, but not to the idea that power is in some sense consubstantial with the development of forces of production, that it forms part of them.

FOUCAULT: Absolutely. And power is constantly being transformed along with them. The Panopticon was at once a programme and a utopia. But the theme of a spatialising,

observing, immobilising, in a word disciplinary power was in fact already in Bentham's day being transcended by other and much more subtle mechanisms for the regulation of phenomena of population, controlling their fluctuations and compensating their irregularities. The tendency of Bentham's thought is archaic in the importance it gives to the gaze; but it is very modern in the general importance it assigns to techniques of power.

PERROT: There is no global State in Bentham: there is the installation of micro-societies, microcosms.

BAROU: Does the deployment of the Panoptic system pertain to the whole of industrial society? Is it the work of capitalist society?

FOUCAULT: Industrial society, capitalist society? I have no answer, except to say that these forms of power recur in socialist societies; their transposition was immediate. But on this point I would rather have the historian speak.

PERROT: It's true that capital accumulation was the work of industrial technology and of the installation of a whole apparatus of power. But it is no less true that a similar process is repeated in Soviet socialist society. In certain respects Stalinism corresponds to the period both of capital accumulation and of the installation of a strong form of power.

BAROU: This returns us to the notion of profit—how Bentham's inhuman machine proves a precious acquisition, for some at least.

FOUCAULT: Of course! It takes the rather naive optimism of the nineteenth century 'dandies' to imagine that the bourgeoisie is stupid. On the contrary, one has to reckon with its strokes of genius, and among these is precisely the fact of its managing to construct machines of power allowing circuits of profit, which in turn re-inforced and modified the power apparatuses in a mobile and circular manner. Feudal power, operating primarily through exaction and expenditure, ended by undermining itself. The power of the bourgeoisie is self-amplifying, in a mode not of conservation but of successive transformations. Hence the fact that its form isn't given in a definitive historical figure as is that of feudalism. Hence both its precariousness and its supple inventiveness. Hence the fact, the possibility, of its fall and

of the revolution has been integral to its history almost from the beginning.

PERROT: One can note that Bentham gives a great deal of space to the question of labour; he returns to it again and again.

FOUCAULT: That accords with the fact that techniques of power are invented to meet the demands of production. I mean production here in the broad sense—it can be a matter of the 'production' of destruction, as with the army.

BAROU: When you use the term 'labour' in your books, it's seldom in relation to productive labour.

FOUCAULT: That's because I happened to be dealing with people situated outside the circuits of productive labour: the insane, prisoners, and now children. For them labour, insofar as they have to perform it, has a value which is chiefly disciplinary.

BAROU: Labour as a form of *dressage*? Isn't it always that?

FOUCAULT: Certainly! There is always present this triple function of labour: the productive function, the symbolic function and the function of *dressage*, or discipline. The productive function equals practically zero for the categories of individuals I am concerned with, whereas the symbolic and disciplinary functions are very important. But most often the three components go together.

PERROT: In any case Bentham seems to me very sure of himself, very confident in the penetrative power of the gaze. One feels he has a very inadequate awareness of the degree of opacity and resistance of the material to be corrected and integrated into society—the prisoners. And isn't Bentham's Panopticon at the same time something of an illusion of power?

FOUCAULT: It's the illusion of almost all of the eighteenth-century reformers who credited opinion with considerable potential force. Since opinion could only be good, being the immediate consciousness of the whole social body, they thought people would become virtuous by the simple fact of being observed. For them, opinion was like a spontaneous re-actualisation of the social contract. They overlooked the real conditions of possibility of opinion, the 'media' of opinion, a materiality caught up in the mechanisms of the

economy and power in its forms of the press, publishing, and later the cinema and television.

PERROT: When you say they overlooked the media, you mean that they failed to see the necessity of working through the media?

FOUCAULT: And failed to see that these media would necessarily be under the command of economico-political interests. They failed to perceive the material and economic components of opinion. They believed opinion would be inherently just, that it would spread of its own accord, that it would be a sort of democratic surveillance. Basically it was journalism, that capital invention of the nineteenth century, which made evident all the utopian character of this politics of the gaze.

PERROT: These thinkers generally misunderstood the difficulty they would have in making their system take effect. They didn't realise that there would always be ways of slipping through their net, or that resistances would have a role to play. In the domain of prisons, the convicts weren't passive beings. It's Bentham who gives us to suppose that they were. The discourse of the penitentiary unfolds as though there were no people confronting it, nothing except a *tabula rasa* of subjects to be reformed and returned to the circuit of production. In reality it had to work with a material—the prisoners—which put up formidable resistance. The same could be said about Taylorism. The system of Taylorism was an extraordinary invention by an engineer who wants to combat laziness and everything that slows down production. But one can still ask: did Taylorism ever really work?

FOUCAULT: This indeed is another of the factors which shift Bentham into the domain of the unreal: the effective resistance of people. This is something you have studied, Michelle Perrot. How did people in the workshops and the *cités ouvrières* resist the system of surveillance and constant record-taking? Were they aware of the constraining, subjecting, unbearable character of that surveillance? In a word, were there revolts against the gaze?

PERROT: There were indeed revolts against the gaze. The workers' repugnance for living in the *cités ouvrières* is patent. The *cités ouvrières* were failures for a long time. So

too was the system of units of time which is so evident in the Panopticon. The factory with its time-schedules long aroused passive resistance manifested by the fact of people simply not turning up for work. Such is the epic of the Saint-Lundi, 'Holy Monday', the day workers invented as a weekly break. There were many forms of resistance to the industrial system, to the extent that for an initial period the bosses had to beat a retreat. And to take another point, the system of micro-powers wasn't installed at a stroke. This type of surveillance and hierarchy was developed first in the mechanised sectors occupied by mainly female and child labour, that is by those already accustomed to obey. But in, shall we say, the virile sectors such as engineering, one finds quite a different situation. The management isn't successful all at once in installing its surveillance; it has therefore, for the first half of the nineteenth century, to delegate its powers. It contracts with a team of labourers through the person of their chief, often the oldest or most skilled worker. One sees a veritable counter-power being exercised by the craftsmen, one which sometimes has two facets: one directed at the bosses, in defence of the workers' community; the other sometimes turned against the workers themselves, since the petty chief oppresses his apprentices or his fellows. In fact these forms of working-class counter-power continued to exist up to the time when management were able to mechanise those functions which had escaped their control until then. It was able thereby to abolish the power of the skilled worker. There were countless examples of this: in the rolling-mills the chief of a shop had the capacity to resist a boss up until the time when semi-automatic machines were installed. In a flash the thermal control mechanism replaced the expert mill-hand, able to judge—at a glance, once again—the instant the material was ready. Reading a thermometer was sufficient.

FOUCAULT: That being so, resistances to the Panopticon will have to be analysed in tactical and strategic terms, positing that each offensive from the one side serves as leverage for a counter-offensive from the other. The analysis of power-mechanisms has no built-in tendency to show power as being at once anonymous and always victorious. It is a matter rather of establishing the positions

occupied and modes of actions used by each of the forces at work, the possibilities of resistance and counter-attack on either side.

BAROU: Battles, actions and reactions, offensives and counter-offensives: you talk like a strategist. Are resistances to power then essentially physical in character? What about the content of struggles, the aspirations that manifest themselves in them?

FOUCAULT: This is indeed an important question of theory and method. One thing strikes me about this. Certain political discourses make a lot of use of the language of relations of forces: 'struggle' is the word used most often. Yet it seems to me that people sometimes hesitate to follow through the consequences of this, or even to pose the problem implicit in this vocabulary—namely, whether these 'struggles' are, or are not, to be analysed as episodes in a war, whether the grid for deciphering them should be that of strategy and tactics? Is the relation between forces in the order of politics a warlike one? I don't personally feel prepared to answer this with a definite yes or no. It just seems to me that the affirmation, pure and simple, of a 'struggle' can't act as the beginning and end of all explanations in the analysis of power-relations. This theme of struggle only really becomes operative if one establishes concretely—in each particular case—who is engaged in struggle, what the struggle is about, and how, where, by what means and according to what rationality it evolves. In other words, if one wants to take seriously the assertion that struggle is the core of relations of power, one must take into account the fact that the good old 'logic' of contradiction is no longer sufficient, far from it, for the unravelling of actual processes.

PERROT: In other words, coming back to the Panopticon, Bentham doesn't merely formulate the project of a utopian society, he also describes a society that actually exists.

FOUCAULT: He describes, in the utopian form of a general system, particular mechanisms which really exist.

PERROT: And there's no point for the prisoners in taking over the central tower?

FOUCAULT: Oh yes, provided that isn't the final purpose of the operation. Do you think it would be much better to have

the prisoners operating the Panoptic apparatus and sitting in the central tower, instead of the guards?

Notes

1 Cf. the note on Translations and Sources in this volume.
2 John Howard, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales, with Preliminary Observations and an Account of some Foreign Prisons and Hospitals* (1777).